

Remembering the original meaning of Mother's Day



BARB GUY

My husband, Chris, and I are just back from a trip to southern Indiana. His mom and dad, in their mid- and late-80s, still live in the house on 100 acres of land where they raised their four kids. In fact, Chris' bedroom is still a shrine to his childhood, as are his siblings'.

While we see his parents every year, Chris has only spent about two weeks at home since graduate school, a few days at a time once every several years. He decided it was time to go back and really immerse, staying for nearly two weeks.

We asked Chris' mom, Alice, to suggest a project around the house that we could do as a gift for Mother's Day. That's how we ended up spending days scraping paint off metal patio furniture with wire brushes, shopping for new cushions, painting the front porch and the

furniture, picking out red geraniums, buying a ton of groceries for the workers and throwing a big family dinner on Mother's Day.

I was happy to be honoring Chris' mom - she's a former teacher, a community volunteer, a donator-to-charity and the woman who gave me someone great to marry. But while my heart was definitely engaged in the Mother's Day activities in Indiana, it was also reaching out to other places.

I was longing for the days when my mom was alive and we celebrated Mother's Day together. I was also smiling about all the kids I love and thinking especially of my darling friend Erin who, although I didn't know it then, was leaving a bouquet of Mother's Day flowers and a card on my porch in Salt Lake City. She thanks me for being a second mom to her. I thank her for being a dear girl, one of the most special people in my world.

I was also thinking on Mother's Day about the women and men who spent the day in Lafayette Park across the street from the White House. The peace group Code Pink organized a 24-hour Mother's Day vigil there calling for peace in Iraq and Iran. Code Pink women dress in pink and have slogans like "Give George Bush a pink slip."

They have a lot of fun but their aim is serious - no more war. At the Mother's Day event, thousands of attendees, mostly wearing pink, lined up their bodies to form an inspirational aerial message: Mom Says NO WAR.

War is why Mother's Day was created in the first place. It was originally named Mother's Peace Day. The carnage of the Civil War inspired Julia Ward Howe to decry war as a pointless exercise in which some mothers' sons kill other mothers' sons. Many women's groups still make a special effort on Mother's Day, keeping the intent of the day alive.

Mothers whose sons or daughters are on duty in Iraq or who have died fighting wars, mothers who don't want to have to send their children to war and other people who are working for peace gathered in Washington, D.C. last Sunday. While I was painting patio chairs in Indiana my heart was with them.

I don't usually wear my PJs in public, but I would have loved to attend the Pennsylvania Avenue Pink Pajama Party and I would have enjoyed marching past the White House in my pink hightops. Later last week, I settled for watching Internet

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video of some of the day's activities.

In one segment, a speaker at the rally gestured to her pink corsage and said, "I want to thank the soldier who gave me this because I don't have flowers from my son this Mother's Day." She told of sending her son off to fight in Iraq last year, only to return to the airport to collect his casket 90 days later.

Soon the woman was sobbing, but she continued, "My son's body was returned as cargo on a commercial aircraft. My son was not unloaded [for hours]. Dogs were taken off the aircraft, the luggage was taken off the aircraft, [but] my son's body stayed on the aircraft because this government would not let you see a flag-draped casket. I don't want another mother to walk in my path."

That's why Mother's Day was created. Julia Howe envisioned a day when mothers would no longer lose their sons - or their daughters - to war. One hundred and thirty-six years later, we're not there yet.

Barb Guy is a regular contributor to these pages. © Salt Lake Tribune.